

# CITY OF HOUGHTON PLANNING COMMISSION 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

## 1. Introduction

The City of Houghton Planning Commission fulfills a requirement of the Planning Enabling Act. Duties of the commission include:

- Prepare and approve a master plan that is reviewed annually and updated every five years.
- Prepare a capital improvement program to submit to the council for adoption every year.
- Review and update the zoning ordinance periodically to make sure it complies with the master plan.
- Review and update the zoning map periodically to make sure it complies with the master plan.
- Hold public hearings and recommend or not recommend requests from citizens in accordance with the zoning ordinance.
- Perform site plan reviews of new developments.

## 2. Purpose of Report

This annual report is required in the Planning Enabling Act. This report increases information-sharing between the commission, staff, boards, the public, and the governing body.

## 3. 2024 Membership

### Segment Represented:

a. Tom Merz, Chairperson	Educational
b. Bill Leder, Vice Chairperson	Transportation/Utility/Communication
c. Dan Liebau, Secretary	At-large
d. Norma Veurink	Industrial/Economic
e. Eric Waara, City Manager	
f. Brian Irizarry, Mayor (Replaced by Bob Backon November 2024)	
g. Joan Suits, Council Representative (Replaced by Craig Waddell August 2024)	Government/Municipal/Housing
h. Kristine Bradof	Environmental
i. Ben Ciavola	Recreational/Tourism

## 4. Committees

The following committees worked on specific chapters of the master plan:

Recreation – Liebau, Ciavola, Irizarry, Veurink

Neighborhoods and Housing – Bradof, Waara, Leder

Mobility – Leder, Liebau, Merz

Downtown and M-26 – Bradof, Waara, Irizarry, Suits

Economic Development and Zoning – Waara, Merz, Veurink

Sustainability and Resilience – Bradof, Liebau, Ciavola

Other committees:

Zoning Ordinance – Waara, Veurink, Leder, Bradof

Food Truck Ordinance – Waara, Liebau, Leder

Recreation (Trail Town Advisory) – Waara, Merz, Liebau  
 Redevelopment Sites – Waara, Ciavola, Veurink, Suits  
 Huron Creek Watershed Advisory – Waara, Merz, Bradof, Leder  
 Branding and Marketing – Waara, Merz, Liebau, Ciavola

## **5. Meetings**

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires that local Planning Commissions meet at least four times a year. The City of Houghton Planning Commission meets on the fourth Tuesday of the month. They held 9 meetings during the year on these dates:

January 23, 2024  
 January 31, 2024 – Joint Meeting with Council and DDA  
 February 27, 2024  
 April 23, 2024  
 June 25, 2024  
 July 23, 2024  
 August 27, 2024  
 September 24, 2024  
 October 22, 2024

## **6. Master Plan and Economic Development Strategy Review**

The committees finished their work on the master plan chapters including economic development. The City of Houghton Master Plan 2024-2028 was recommended by the commission in April 2024 and adopted by the council in May 2024.

## **7. Other Plans**

The commission approved the Capital Improvement Plan and recommended it for adoption by the council. This plan was adopted by the council on June 12, 2024.

## **8. Zoning Ordinance Amendments**

No amendments were made to the zoning ordinance in 2024.

## **9. Development Reviews**

<b>Project Type</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Status</b>
Site Plan Review	3200 W Sharon Avenue	Remy Battery new building	Approved by PC February 27, 2024
Site Plan Review	1550 Brickyard Lane	Houghton Building Supply addition	Approved by PC June 25, 2024
Site Plan Review	1000 Cedar Street	Aspirus Clinic addition	Approved by PC October 22, 2024

## **10. Zoning Map Changes and Requests for Changes**

There were no changes made to the zoning map in 2024.

## **11. Zoning Department Annual Development Review**

The city received 31 Zoning Permits in 2024. All 31 were approved.

There were 8 commercial Zoning Permits completed for a total of \$2,758,000 in value and 23 residential Zoning Permits completed for a total of \$2,397,400 in value of which \$1,582,000 was for the construction of 6 new residential houses. 1 Zoning Permit was issued to a non-taxable property for a total of \$1,500,000.

## **12. Variances granted by Zoning Board of Appeals**

The Zoning Board of Appeals granted variances:

106 West South – front and side yard

109 West Edwards – rear yard

1922 Sherwood – front yard

205 West Douglass – rear yard

## **13. Trainings Attended in 2024 and Training Plan for 2025:**

City Manager Waara attended the Michigan Municipal League Annual Conference where the city was awarded the 2024 Community of Excellence; Michigan Road Commission Engineers.

Tom Merz attended EGLE Catalyst Communities – Introduction to Climate and Health Adaptation Planning - A Health in All Policies Approach; EGLE Planning for Sustainable Small Harbors – Project Overview and Useful Tools; EGLE Community Energy Management Program Request for Proposal and Application Overview; and the Michigan Municipal League Annual Conference.

Norma Veurink attended EGLE – Materials Management Conference, MDOT Rural Bikeways Planning and Design, Short Term Rental Policy Options for Michigan Communities, MEDC Talk to Me Series: Your Place Matters.

Kristine Bradof attended MSU – Short-term-rental Policy Options; EGLE Catalyst Communities Climate and Health Adaptation Planning – A Health in All Policies Approach Parts 1-3; MSUE Citizen Planner UP-NE LP cohort; MSU Focus Group on Utility-Scale Solar including collaboration with adjoining townships; MSU and U of M Center for Empowering Communities Changes Coming to Renewal Energy Legislation; MSU Extension Wild About Conservation Series – Composting; EGLE Catalyst Communities – Turning Waste into Gold: Composting at the Local Government Level.

Dan Liebau attended MDOT – Rural Bikeways Planning and Design.

Craig Waddell attended MSU Short-term-rental webinar, SL Environmental Law Group – PFAS Settlement Updates Forum for Water Systems; EGLE Catalyst Communities – Climate and Health Adaptation Planning – A Health in All Policies Approach; MML Newly Elected Officials Training; NMPSA DDA & Revitalization Seminar; EGLE Materials Management Conference; League of Women Voters Civility Project; League of Women Voters meeting with Deputy Secretary of State regarding voting rights; MSU Short-Term Rental Policy Options for Local Communities; MSU 2024 Governing Essentials Webinar Series – Components of Extraordinary Governance and Parliamentary Procedure and Open Meetings Act; MSU ZBA Online Certification, Michigan Municipal League Annual Conference.

Training Plan for 2025:

- a. Members will be encouraged to attend training to better familiarize themselves with the role of the planning commission in local government.
- b. Members that attend training sessions are asked to briefly describe the training they attended and update other members on what was learned during the Reports section of the agenda at the next commission meeting.

## **14. Other Business**

- a. The commission held a joint meeting with the Houghton City Council, Downtown Development Authority and Local Development Finance Authority. They received presentations from Jeff Ratcliff, Executive Director of KEDA, Ray Govus, Community Development Manager with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, and Antonio Adan, Housing Specialist with the Marquette County Land Bank. The speakers presented information on Economic Development Financing Tools for Community Development.
- b. The zoning ordinance committee worked on the portions of the ordinance dealing with stormwater management and site plan review to simplify the process. The goal is to have these revisions in place for the 2025 construction season. They will work on other portions of the ordinance, including signs, after they have completed stormwater and site plans.
- c. The branding and marketing committee is working to create a city brand as a part of the Redevelopment Ready process. The committee created a survey in the fall of 2024. The survey was open for comments from November 11<sup>th</sup> to December 13<sup>th</sup>. A total of 637 responses were received. The respondents ranged from permanent residents, seasonal residents, tourists, and Michigan Tech students. The committee will meet again in early 2025 to discuss the results of the survey and next steps.

## **15. Public Participation Report**

On January 9, 2021, the City of Houghton adopted a Public Participation Plan to guide and outline policies, procedures, and methods to effectively and equitably engage public input during planning, zoning, and development processes. In addition to all required State measures for public participation, the plan identifies methods of proactive public involvement, acts as a tool for accountability and transparency, and illustrates ways to share feedback and results to the public in a timely manner.

The city held an open house event on July 17<sup>th</sup> to accept resident input for possible projects at Garnet Street Park, West Houghton Neighborhood Park, and Woodhaven Park using the city's remaining ARPA funds. The city manager took the comments received and prepared a list of projects for these parks. The projects were approved by the planning commission and council.

## **16.Looking Ahead to 2025**

- a. The zoning ordinance committee will continue their work updating the ordinance.
- b. The branding and marketing committee will review the results of the survey and continue the process.
- c. Review the zoning map for possible revision.
- d. Hold a joint meeting with the council and DDA.
- e. Invite the City of Hancock and Portage Township planning commissions to a joint meeting.
- f. Annual capital improvement plan review and recommendation to council.
- g. Review Master Plan Economic Development Strategy (requirement of Redevelopment Ready Community - must be done annually).
- h. Update Redevelopment Ready Community priority development sites.
- i. Study possible downtown building height limits.
- j. Establish a Sustainability and Resilience Committee, Mobility Committee, and Housing Committee.